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# George Bush: The Hot Property in Presidential Politics

## Switch to CIA

Bush stayed in Peking a little more than a year, when Ford asked him to return to Washington to take over the Central Intelligence Agency. It was a controversial choice in the Senate because of Bush's past identification with partisan politics. Eventually Ford had to promise not to consider Bush as a running mate in 1976 to convince the Senate to confirm him.

There was some puzzlement over why Bush would want to take over the troubled agency. Its misdeeds and shortcomings were still tumbling into the headlines as the result of House and Senate investigations. The directorship of the CIA hardly looked like a political asset, and Bush acknowledged that he hoped to return to politics one day.

Nevertheless, he said he regarded the work as "desperately important to the survival of this country and to the survival of freedom around the world. And second," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "old-fashioned as it may seem to some, it is my duty to serve my country."

Bush pledged to keep politics out of intelligence, and many praised him for succeeding. "I was very concerned about his appointment," recalled Sen. Mathias, who was a member of the Intelligence committee. "But it worked out fine." William Miller, the committee's staff director, said Bush "worked very hard, asked for help and advice and before long he had everyone's respect."

He also reassured the veteran CIA employees who were feeling distinctly unloved at the time Bush came to the agency. "Instead of coming in hostile and suspicious as [Adm. Stansfield] Turner did [after Bush], he took a look around the agency, talked to people and decided he liked it. It was terribly important to have a boss who felt like that," recalls E. Henry Knoche, who served as deputy director under Bush.

Bush built a reputation among intelligence officers as a man who could listen and change his mind. In the summer of 1976, sources say, alarms were sounded over what some considered provocative activity by the Chinese on their side of the Taiwan straits. But the State Department disputed that interpretation forcefully.

In the ensuing bureaucratic battle, which included a high-level meeting at CIA headquarters, Bush refused to be stampeded by the alarmists who turned out to be wrong. Although he was CIA director, he also gave face to some junior State Department participants whom he remembered from past diplomatic duty. He invited them into his office to see his Chinese rugs, leaving more senior advisers from other agencies wondering what was going on.

"He's not the kind of person who goes out looking for issues," added another CIA veteran who knew Bush while he was at the agency, "but he really did a tremendous job stabilizing the situation, improving morale and getting people working again."

"He's not an intellectual," this source said. "He lives day to day and he doesn't brood over anything. He doesn't agonize. But he's very competitive. He's ferocious on the tennis court. He's got to win."

Bush's decision to resign when President Carter was inaugurated troubled Knoche a bit because that carried with it a suggestion that the job had been politicized. But the deputy DCI was still impressed enough with his boss to award Bush the CIA's Intelligence Medal of Merit for his burst of activity following Carter's election.

In a single day, Bush met with President Ford alone in the Oval Office, then sat down with Vice President Rockefeller, conferred with the head of the Office of Management and Budget, about a money crunch, and then flew down to Plains, Ga., with Knoche to brief Carter and Vice President-elect Mondale for six hours on the CIA's secrets, sources and methods. On the flight back, Bush drafted a memo for Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, who was to see Carter the next day, and dropped it off at Kissinger's house at 1:30 a.m. Knoche, as the man in charge of the CIA's day-to-day operations, took it upon himself to give Bush his medal at the daily, top-level staff meeting in Langley a few hours later.